

Greece: Athens, Delphi & Meteora

Air Package Itinerary

On this unique Greek walking adventure, we've paired the sandy beaches and archaeological treasures of the Peloponnese Peninsula with the lofty monasteries of Meteora. Explore stunning seaside mountains at the 7th-century Acropolis of Corinth and enjoy lunch at Sykia Beach. Ride the cog rail through the dramatic canyons of Vouraikos Gorge to the seaside village of Diakopto—then travel to the mainland for an adventure along the slopes of Mount Parnassus. In the company of our knowledgeable leaders, explore the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and meet a local friend for a wine tasting at her nearby estate. Journey to Kastraki and climb the stone steps to the Holy Trinity Monastery—erected on an imposing rocky pinnacle in the 14th-century. For a delicious taste of the Greek islands, add a Post-Trip Extension to the magical island of Santorini. Simply unforgettable!



Highlights

- Hike among the medieval monasteries of Meteora, the astonishing UNESCO World Heritage site of sacred sanctuaries perched on towering sandstone pillars.
- Explore the archaeological site of Delphi, taking in its ancient ruins and magnificent mountain setting.
- Enjoy a refreshing Mythos beer in Galaxidi, once a thriving maritime community, then stroll cobbled streets past pretty 19th-century sea captains' stone houses.
- Follow footpaths in and around Acrocorinth, one of the finest surviving fortifications in Greece, and gaze upon panoramas of the Isthmus of Corinth.
- Take a historic cog railway journey through the Vouraikos Gorge—into the deep-cut canyon past

roaring waterfalls and through tunnels burrowed into mountainsides, with spectacular views of dramatic landscapes all around.

On all Fully-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Air Packages include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated moderate (with challenging sections), and an average of 3 to 5 miles per day, with limited options. There are some ascents and descents, with maximum elevation gains (and losses) of 600-1,600 feet. Some slopes are short and steep (5-15 minutes), while others are sustained (30-90 minutes). The terrain includes cobblestone and paved streets, gravel roads, packed dirt trails, and hiking trails, with rocks and loose gravel stretches. The days on this tour are

pretty full to allow for the inclusion of diverse regions of cultural and historical importance.

Flight Day

Depart for Your Vacation

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

Arrival Day

Arrive in Athens. Pre-Tour Hotel Night: Athens

Start off your first day in Athens right by having a Country Walkers representative greet you at the airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this magnificent city at your leisure.

DAY 1

Your VBT Vacation Begins. Corinth Canal and Acrocorinth. Travel to Kalavrita

1-2 miles, easy to moderate

After enjoying an included breakfast at your hotel, meet your leaders at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of your Athens hotel. They'll be wearing Country Walkers shirts for easy identification. Please ensure your luggage is tagged, as it will be transported ahead to your awaiting minibus, located a short walk from the hotel.

Your destination this morning is the Acropolis of Corinth, but first, you'll stop after about an hour to admire the Corinth Canal, which links the Gulf of Corinth to the Aegean Sea. Completed in 1893—though first proposed by the ruler Periander in the 7th century BCE—this engineering marvel cuts through a dramatic rock canyon. As you gaze down into its depths, imagine the annual swim race that crosses its entire length. Though there is no tide, the alternating currents present quite a challenge to competitors!

Next, continue onto the legendary Peloponnese Peninsula and the nearby Acropolis of Corinth, also known as Acrocorinth, or "Upper Corinth." This massive monolithic hill, crowned by a fortress dating to the 7th century BCE, has served as a last line of defense through ancient and medieval times. Some consider it

the most impressive fortress-like structure on mainland Greece. During your walk, you'll traverse low-shrub terrain and take in a rich medley of Roman, Byzantine, Frankish, Venetian, and Ottoman ramparts; preserved remains of chapels, houses, and mosques; walled gates; and panoramic views of the seaside mountains. For those who wish, a climb to the summit reveals the fortress ruins and sweeping coastal vistas. Follow the packed-dirt trail and stop at the Church of St. Dimitrios for a brief visit.

Later, continue by coach to Sykia Beach on the northern coastal border of the Peloponnese. Here, enjoy a casual lunch of typical Greek specialties such as savory dips—including *tzatziki* (yogurt, cucumber, and garlic), *melitzanosalata* (eggplant), and grilled fish. (You may wish to pack your bathing suit and quick-dry towel in your backpack for a pre-lunch swim.)

In the afternoon, travel on to Kalavrita, a charming alpine town nestled among fir-covered slopes. Famous for its historic rack-and-pinion railway that winds through a vertiginous gorge, Kalavrita offers a peaceful, off-the-beaten-path escape. Upon arrival, settle into your hotel and gather later for an orientation meeting followed by a welcome dinner hosted by a local chef. You may even have the chance to assist in preparing the meal—perhaps picking mushrooms or gathering herbs—before enjoying a delicious dinner of local fare paired with fine regional wine.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Chelmos-Vouraikos National Park. Cave of the Lakes and Planitero. Independent Exploration of Kalavrita

5 miles, easy to moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation loss

After a leisurely breakfast, drive about 30 minutes to the nearby Cave of the Lakes, an impressive subterranean system featuring unusual rock formations and a series of stepped lakes. Enjoy a guided visit as you walk along boardwalks through galleries and chambers, admiring shimmering stalactites and stalagmites—some resembling delicate, ribbon-like curtains. The cave's 13 stepped "lakes," each formed by mineral deposits over an ancient underground riverbed, create a truly otherworldly atmosphere. Remarkably, fossils discovered here suggest that hippopotamuses once passed through, and evidence shows human habitation dating back to 6000 BCE.

From the Cave of the Lakes, set off on foot along the E4, a European long-distance walking path that stretches from Spain to Greece. Follow a rocky trail that descends steadily through a peaceful landscape of pine, pear, walnut, and plane trees, accompanied by the sound of rushing waters bound for the Aroanios River. Arrive around midday in Planitero, a picturesque village known for its springs, and settle in at a family-run restaurant for lunch. Sample regional specialties such as onion pie with *mizithra* cheese, *saganaki planiteros* (a flavorful mix of cheese, peppers, tomatoes, parsley, and potatoes), and the local trout for which the area is renowned.

After this satisfying meal, return to Kalavrita for a free afternoon and evening. You may choose to relax at your hotel or explore the town at your own pace. Browse shops for local specialties like preserves, honey, olive oil, and herbal teas, or visit the Folklore and Historical Museum. For dinner, choose from one of the many inviting tavernas along the main street, offering traditional Greek fare in a casual setting.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Kato Zachlorou and Travel to Galaxidi via Nafpaktos

3 miles, easy to moderate

Rise early this morning for breakfast, then travel by minibus to the trailhead for an easy morning walk through beautiful alpine scenery to the train station at Kato Zachlorou. Here, you'll board the first departure of the unique cog railway that winds through the stunning Vouraikos Gorge. This magnificent journey descends through a deep-cut canyon, past roaring waterfalls and through tunnels carved into the mountainsides, offering spectacular views of dramatic landscapes along the way.

Your destination is the seaside town of Diakopto, where you'll meet your shuttle and driver. Bidding the Peloponnese Peninsula farewell, continue north to Galaxidi—stopping en route for an independent lunch and perhaps a swim in the charming town of Nafpaktos. You'll cross the Gulf of Corinth on the impressive Rion-Antirion Bridge, one of the world's longest multi-span cable-stayed bridges, stretching 9,450 feet (about a mile and a half).

Arrive in the seaside fishing village of Galaxidi, once home to brave mariners, in time for a late afternoon stroll. This charming village, with its red-roofed houses and cobbled streets, is lined with inviting cafés

along a picturesque waterfront. Stop for a refreshing drink or ice cream on your own. You might also walk through the century-old pine forest—planted by local schoolchildren—along the harbor, or explore the peaceful neighborhoods dotted with captains' mansions, remnants of Galaxidi's prosperous maritime past.

Later, continue the drive for about 30 more minutes to Delphi. Settle into your comfortable room, then gather for dinner featuring traditional seasonal fare at a nearby restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

Mount Parnassus. Ancient Pilgrimage Route of Delphi

5 miles, moderate, 1,610-ft. elevation loss

Rise to the sound of birdsong, stunning views of the sea, and a “sea of olive trees” stretching upward from the Gulf of Corinth. Enjoy a generous buffet of local specialties to fuel up for your morning walk: cured meats, local cheeses, yogurt, piping hot coffee, fresh fruit, eggs, breads, and sweet cakes and pastries. Towering above your boutique hotel is the imposing Mount Parnassus, home to the oldest continuously used footpath in the world—the Archaio Monopati. This ancient trail once connected the legendary sanctuary at Delphi with the Corycian Cave, sacred to the nymphs and the Muses, and considered the winter dwelling place of the god Pan.

Depart on foot from your hotel to the nearby trailhead, where your route begins on the lower slopes of this mighty mountain. You'll follow the E4 path—the same cross-continental trail you explored two days ago—through one of Greece's most extensive olive groves toward the ancient port of Kirra, dating back at least to 3000 BCE. Along the way, you'll be rewarded with spectacular views of the valley and the Gulf of Corinth.

At midday, arrive by minibus in the seaside town of Itea and pause for lunch on your own at one of the many inviting tavernas. Later, return to your hotel, where you may choose to relax with a book or browse the shops in town before an evening of independent exploration and dining. This cozy village offers a variety of cafés and restaurants—select one for a refreshing drink followed by dinner on your own. Your leaders will be happy to provide recommendations. Retire in comfort after a full day of discovery.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5

Archaeological Site of Delphi and Travel to Kastraki

1-2 miles, easy to moderate

After another hearty, fresh breakfast, head to the magnificent archaeological site of ancient Delphi, a UNESCO World Heritage site. For over a thousand years, priests, city-state leaders, and pilgrims made their way up treacherous mountain passes to seek cryptic guidance from the Delphic Oracle. This morning, you'll walk in their footsteps as you explore the museum and archaeological site with a private guide. Enter via the Sacred Precinct, passing the remains of memorials, treasures, and the remarkable Polygonal Wall before reaching the impressive ruins of the Temple of Apollo.

After time to take it all in, travel north aboard your dedicated minibus, skirting the base of Mount Parnassus en route to the village of Polydrosos. Upon arrival, enjoy a light lunch and wine tasting, featuring a personal introduction to a few selections from our friend Despina's nearby estate. Among the nine varieties produced, the winery focuses on reviving and cultivating nearly forgotten grape varietals.

Following lunch, continue approximately 2.5 hours to Kastraki, a village dramatically nestled beneath the towering rock formations of Meteora—one of the most significant and awe-inspiring complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries in the world.

After settling into your hotel, gather in the restaurant for dinner, savoring thoughtfully prepared cuisine and breathtaking views of the dramatic landscape.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

Monasteries of the Meteora: Dormition of the Virgin Mary to Holy Trinity and Great Meteoron to Kastraki

2 miles, moderate, 600-ft. elevation gain and 3-4 miles, moderate with challenging sections, 850-ft. elevation loss

Precipitously perched between heaven and earth above the Peneas Valley on the Thessalian plain, the monasteries of Meteora (meaning “in midair”) are both astonishing architectural feats and enduring testaments to the will of the faithful. Your walks among these exalted and inspirational monastic dwellings are among the highlights of your adventure. But your day begins at ground level, at the beautiful Kalabaka Byzantine Church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary—one of the few buildings in the Old Town not destroyed by the Germans during World War II. Built in the 4th or 5th century, it features 11th- and 16th-century Byzantine frescoes and a beautiful mosaic floor. Though less dramatically situated than its lofty counterparts, it is highly revered for being nearly 1,000 years older.

Continue upward for your first close-up glimpse of the famed monasteries of Meteora, a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is believed that Greek Orthodox monks built a small church at the base of these rock pillars in the 12th century. During the political strife of the 14th century, they began building atop the inaccessible columns of stone that dominate the landscape. Eventually, 24 monasteries towered above the unrest below; today, six remain. You’ll follow a well-established trail and ascend 140 steps over the course of about an hour to reach the Holy Trinity (Agia Triada) Monastery—famously featured in the James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*. Enjoy the sweeping views from this unique perch and visit its small, fresco-filled circular chapel and 15th-century cathedral.

Afterward, drive a short distance past the Great Meteoron Monastery—also known as the Holy Monastery of the Metamorphosis or Transfiguration of Christ—the largest and oldest monastery in the complex. Built on the highest rock, it was founded by the monk Saint Athanasios, who is credited with establishing the monastic movement at Meteora. Your walk continues from here along a lesser-known trail just beyond the monastery. As you descend back down to Kastraki, take in more breathtaking vistas of the dramatic rock formations and pause to savor a picnic lunch in the shade near Ypapanti Monastery.

After lunch, continue on foot toward Kastraki, then shuttle back to your hotel, where you may wish to relax poolside with a well-deserved refreshment. (Guests who prefer to skip this more challenging trail may opt to enjoy their picnic near the Great Meteoron Monastery, explore its religious icons and stunning frescoes independently, and return to the hotel with the driver.)

This evening, head to a local restaurant for a festive farewell dinner accompanied by Greek wine and traditional music featuring the *bouzouki*, a long-necked mandolin central to Greek folk culture.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Varlaam Monastery to Kastraki. Your Country Walkers Vacation Ends

1.5 miles, easy to moderate, 725-ft. elevation loss

After breakfast, travel by minibus to the Holy Monastery of Varlaam, the second-largest of the Meteora monasteries, named for the monk who first built a tiny chapel on this promontory in the 14th century. Take time to explore the museum of monastic history, view an original rope basket once used (until the mid-19th century) to haul monks and provisions, and admire the exquisite late-Byzantine frescoes and sweeping panoramic views.

Depart the monastery on foot—or opt for a ride down to town with our dedicated driver and minibus—arriving in Kastraki by mid-morning. Bid farewell to Meteora and drive south (approximately 2.5 hours) to Kamena Vourla, a scenic coastal town along the Malian Gulf. Here, enjoy a final meal of fresh seafood and raise a glass of ouzo, the local anise-flavored aperitif, to toast the week's adventures.

Later, continue your journey to Athens, arriving at our Post-Tour hotel by approximately 5:30 p.m.

The rest of the evening is yours to enjoy at your leisure—perhaps explore the city, rest at the hotel, or choose a local restaurant for dinner. We provide detailed city information to help you plan the remainder of your day.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Departure Day

Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation will be provided to Athens International Airport based on your departure time.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

	Air Package	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
15 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 5 lunches and 4 dinners	✓	✓
Local leaders with you throughout tour	✓	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
Two extra nights in Athens	✓	
Airport car service for arrival and departure	✓	
Pre- and post-trip breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	